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TRANSPORTER
Governor Phil Murphy Lt. Governor Tahesha Way NJDOT Commissioner Fran O'Connor
NJ TransAction Conference & Expo

A Call to TransAction

By Lizzy Galamba

Just one year before their 50th Anniversary, the Annual NJ TransAction Conference and Expo is back and bigger than ever with no plans of slowing down.

What once started as a 50-person conference in 1976, TransAction, dubbed "The Country's Premier Transportation Conference and Expo," offers a multitude of workshops and exhibitions designed to improve operations and grow business in planning, engineering, operations, and sales with industry experts and leading agencies, including NJDOT, NJ Transit, Amtrak and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

This year, Commissioner Fran O'Connor served as the first luncheon speaker on the first day of the conference, April 15. Commissioner O'Connor began his speech expressing pride in having the honor to speak before "three of the smartest, most experienced, and well-respected leaders in transportation," referring to Kris Kolluri, President and CEO of NJ Transit; Liam McQuat, Vice President of Engineering Services at Amtrak; and Tom Prendergast, CEO of the Gateway Development Commission. He ended his introduction with a joke:

"Kris, Liam, and Tom, you guys really are rock stars in this industry," Commissioner O'Connor said. "So, I'm gonna do what any good opening act should do, try not to clear the room before the real show starts."

Continued on page 2

IN THIS EDITION

Kindness Korner - Hallway Etiquette
Page 4

On the Ground and in the Air
Pages 5-6

Empowering Employees through Workplace Wellness
Page 7

News & Notes
Pages 8-26

Commissioner O'Connor reflected on the stability he has found, as a leader, working "with people you respect, people who show up every day and lead with purpose," especially when dealing with extremely unstable conditions, like the I-80 sinkhole repairs.

He recognized that, when talking about NJDOT and our work, it is hard to overlook the I-80 sinkholes and the effect the closure is having on thousands of commuters every day. He reassures the audience that "New Jersey DOT is responding with urgency" and "working around the clock to stabilize the area, make necessary repairs and assess the root causes."

Two lanes on I-80 eastbound opened on May 21 and two lanes westbound were expected to open by the end of May.

The Commissioner then took a moment to recognize the privilege he has working with his NJDOT colleagues who "rise to the challenge with urgency, skill, and heart," giving this special shoutout:

"From our engineers and field crews, to our traffic operations team and partners – these people stepped up without hesitation, because that's what they do," Commissioner O'Connor said. "That's what real commitment looks like. That's what public service looks like. It's about showing up for the millions of New Jerseyans who count on us to keep things moving, and make sure they get home safely. That's the promise we make – and every single time, this team delivers."

One promise that has been particularly meaningful and has inspired Commissioner O'Connor is safety. Although this may have started as a promise to deliver safe and reliable infrastructure, which we are delivering faster with methods like Design-Build – the second project of which, Commissioner O'Connor announced, will replace the Route 9 westbound Bridge over I-95 and Routes 1&9/46/4; that promise has since evolved to not only improve roadway safety but influence safer driving behavior.

"As many of you know, improving roadway safety isn't just part of the job for me – it's a mission," Commissioner O'Connor said. "The way I see it, in any job – but especially one in public service – people have to come first. You have to connect on a human level if you want to be successful on a professional level. You have to care. And one of the most caring things we can do is try to protect each other."

Launched just shy of a year ago, Commissioner O'Connor's Roadway Safety Public Awareness Program has received more than 185 million impressions. "That's 185 million chances to make people slow down and think about the lives they're affecting every time they get behind the wheel," Commissioner O'Connor said. To learn more, see "Safety Starts with Us," on the first page of the November 2024 Transporter.

In January, Governor Phil Murphy and Commissioner O'Connor, in partnership with New Jersey advocates for roadway safety, teamed up to create the Target Zero Commission. Expanding the vision Commissioner O'Connor set forth in his public awareness program, the Target Zero Commission aims to eliminate all traffic deaths by 2040. The idea being that all roadway tragedies are 100 percent avoidable and can be eliminated by shared interest and investment into safer infrastructure and driver education.

"Now, I know some of you may hear that and think it sounds too ambitious. But to those skeptics, here's what I say: What's the alternative?" Commissioner O'Connor said. "Are we supposed to pick a number that's more 'realistic' or 'achievable'? Is twenty deaths a year ok? How about fifty? A hundred? Look, there is no acceptable number of lives we can afford to lose. Not for me. Not for you. Not for any of us."

To learn more, see "Getting to Zero Means Rethinking Everything," on the first page of the March 2025 Transporter.

Commissioner O'Connor hopes that the Northeast Association of State Transportation Organizations (NASTO) 2025 Annual Conference, which will be hosted by NJDOT in July, will be the space to find solutions and make advancements in reaching our Target Zero goal. This year's theme, "Advancing Safety Through Innovation," is a call to action.

"We have to look beyond what's been done before," Commissioner O'Connor said. "That means breaking down bureaucratic silos. It means streamlining processes that might delay life-saving projects. And it means embracing public-private partnerships, harnessing technology, and sharing data in real-time. But more than anything … it means keeping people at the center of everything we do."

Jaime Oplinger, Director, Division of Traffic Engineering; Syed A. Kazmi, Executive Manager, Bureau of Traffic Engineering, North; and Kelly McVeigh, Executive Manager, Bureau of Traffic Engineering, South; are industry leaders in using innovative technologies to advance safety for vulnerable roadway users. At this year's TransAction Conference, they inspired others to find their own innovative solutions in their discussion on Intelligent Traffic Signals for Pedestrian and Vehicular Safety in New Jersey and Advanced Engineering Techniques by NJDOT. For more information on their lifesaving work, see Innovative Intersections on Page 4 of the January 2025 *Transporter.*

More recently, Kazmi's team met with Fort Lee Mayor Mark Sokolich and other public officials to share the Division of Traffic Engineering's pedestrian safety enforcement plan for the Route 5-Abbot Boulevard Intersection in Fort Lee.

Like the Butterfly Effect, reaching one driver, improving one intersection sets off a chain reaction that will shift driving culture from, what some may call, a nightmarish task to, what should be, a safe and simple part of the daily routine. A ripple that turns into a wave, a future where everyone makes it home every day.

"So, here's what I want to ask of all of you," Commissioner O'Connor said in his final thoughts. "Let's rise to the moment. Let's move faster, think bigger, and push harder – not because it's a new cause to get behind, but because it's the right thing to do. Let's commit to Target Zero – not just within our own agencies, companies, and communities – but together, as one industry, united."

Watch Commissioner O'Connor's TransAction speech, here.

Kindness Korner - Hallway Etiquette

By Nick DeJohn

In the bustling offices of Central Perk Enterprises, even something as simple as walking down the hallway can significantly impact everyone's day.

It was a typical Monday morning, and Rachel was rushing to a meeting. Her long strides and swinging handbag took up more space than she realized, forcing people to press against the walls to avoid bumping into her as she hurried by.

Among those caught in the squeeze was Monica, carrying a tray of coffees for her team. She had to stop abruptly to let Rachel pass, causing one of the cups to spill. Flustered and worried about the mess, Monica ended up running behind schedule, throwing off her and her co-workers' tight agendas.

Meanwhile, Joey, fresh off a triumphant presentation with senior leadership, headed back to his desk with his colleagues. As they laughed and chatted about their success, they spread across the corridor, blocking anyone trying to pass. Ross, who needed to get to a conference call on time, found himself trapped behind them, unable to move without interrupting their conversation. Despite his efforts, he couldn't make it to his call, facing the consequences of the delay.

Monica and Ross went to complain to senior leadership. Phoebe, ever the problem solver, observed the chaos and suggested implementing a hallway etiquette initiative at the next staff meeting. She emphasized the importance of being mindful of others—walking on the right side, keeping personal items close, and being aware of people trying to pass. Chandler also proposed a poster campaign to promote proper behavior in the shared spaces.

By week's end, Rachel and Joey had adjusted their walking habits. Rachel vowed to be more aware of her surroundings, and Joey agreed to keep his conversations to one side of the path. The office atmosphere improved as everyone began moving with more consideration, showing how small changes in behavior can foster a more harmonious work environment.

This incident at Central Perk Enterprises is a reminder that even simple actions, like walking down a hallway, require thoughtfulness and consideration for others. Sometimes, it's the little things that make the biggest difference.

On the Ground and in the AIR

By Lizzy Galamba

A Beaver Blockage

While most of us worried over Punxsutawney Phil's predictions on Ground Hog Day, the NJDOT Environmental Services and Support Unit (ESSU) fretted over another furry creature. Beavers had moved into Masons Creek, damming up five culverts underneath the runway at the South Jersey Regional Airport. Worried that the nearly completely blocked culverts would cause flooding and safety issues on the runway, the Bureau of Aeronautics requested the dams be removed.

Working with the United States Department of Agriculture, the ESSU identified a licensed trapper, who assisted in trapping and relocating multiple beavers, but the dams remained. South Region Area Supervisor Ed Fala and his crews answered the call.

"Ed was able to coordinate with local crews and over the course of a couple of days using an excavator, vactor truck and good old-fashioned manual labor, Operations personnel were able to completely demolish and remove the blockage of all pipes, restoring normal flow and alleviating flooding concerns," Jason Nowak, Environmental Specialist in NJDOT's Division of Environmental Resources, said. "All aspects of this job, from planning to communication to operation of equipment, was done with the utmost professionalism, skill and efficiency."

Other crew members recognized for their hard work in this undertaking include William Fox, Marc Sims, RJ Hudson, Dan Culliton, Chris Duff, Greg Morgan, and Rafael Vazquez.

"With water levels being increasingly high and underneath three inches of ice, a multi-day plan was devised that involved a backhoe to break up the ice and the dam blockage, using a jet vac to loosen up what couldn't be reached, and finally good old-fashioned grunt work with shovels to achieve 100 percent clear drainage," Nowak said. "I would like to thank supervisors, as well as crew members, who showed that whether it requires heavy equipment, strategic planning, knee deep muck work, or all the above, NJDOT will always put their best foot forward."

Airing It Out

NJDOT's Division of Aeronautics hosted the inaugural Aviation Innovation Resource (AIR) Conference on April 1 in partnership with the American Council of Engineering Companies of New Jersey (ACECNJ) and the Atlantic County Economic Alliance (ACEA).

Commissioner Fran O'Connor opened the conference detailing New Jersey's deep-rooted history in aeronautical innovation from the first balloon fight in the U.S. from Philadelphia to Deptford; to the Wright Brothers establishing their company headquarters in Paterson; to Jimmy Doolittle's innovative flight tests in Boonton; to Newark Airport's evolution; to the FAA William J. Hughes Technical Center; and most recently, the $8.6 million investment into the development of the Aerospace Innovation Center, announced in December 2024.

In closing, Commissioner O'Connor left the audience with some inspiring words. "Innovation doesn't happen by accident – it requires vision, collaboration, and courage. Engineers, pilots, scientists, and dreamers are working every day to shape the future of flight," Commissioner O'Connor said. "Who knows? Maybe the next big breakthrough will come from someone in this very room. As we look ahead, one thing is certain: the sky is not the limit. It's just the beginning."

Participants were then split into three tracks: Innovation, Infrastructure, and Aviation Trending – each track offering five technical sessions – for the morning breakout, before coming back together for lunch, which was followed by the Keynote Panel and Agency Roundtable.

The Keynote Panel, which included industry leaders from Eve Air Mobility, Archer Aviation, and Joby Innovation, discussed Advanced Air Mobility and electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing aircrafts; while the Agency Roundtable featured key players at South Jersey Transportation Authority, Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Atlantic County Economic Alliance, and American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. Both the panel and roundtable were moderated by Kimbrali Davis, Executive Director of NJDOT's Bureau of Aeronautics, Outdoor Advertising and Junkyard.

Following the afternoon breakout sessions, participants were able to network and observe a drone demonstration facilitated by Glenn Stott, David Nevil, and Jake Basantis.

"The conference was fun and informative," Executive Director Davis said. "It gave 140 professionals throughout the state a platform to collaborate on aviation hot topics."

Empowering Employees through Workplace Wellness

By Alice Hendrickson

Exciting News: NJDOT has launched the Employee Wellness Program!

Have you discovered the new Employee Wellness section on the NJDOT Intranet? Did you participate in the April Wellness BINGO challenge or attend our first wellness lunch-and-learn on April 2? If not, you're in for a treat!

We are thrilled to announce that the NJDOT Employee Engagement Unit has expanded to include an in-house Employee Wellness Program. This initiative is dedicated to prioritizing your well-being and creating a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace for everyone. We'll be offering a variety of resources and activities to support your physical, emotional, and mental health, empowering you to thrive both at work and in your personal life.

Research shows that employee wellness is crucial for a flourishing workplace, positively impacting productivity, satisfaction, and overall organizational success. At NJDOT, we are committed to the health and well-being of our valued team members.

Here's why employee wellness matters:

1. Positive Work Culture: Wellness programs boost employee satisfaction, fostering a vibrant work atmosphere.
2. Job Satisfaction and Engagement: When your well-being is prioritized, you're more likely to find satisfaction and enjoyment in your work.
3. Risk Reduction: Our commitment to your welfare demonstrates our dedication to workplace safety and well-being, helping you feel supported and valued.
4. Mental Health Support: We recognize the importance of mental well-being in combating workplace stress and preventing burnout.
5. Healthier Work Environment: Our comprehensive wellness program encourages healthier lifestyles, creating a culture of well-being within our organization.
6. Improved Employee Satisfaction: When you see that we care about your well-being, overall job satisfaction rises, contributing to a healthier and more content workforce.
7. Unity and Social Wellness: Shared wellness activities build camaraderie, improving workplace relationships and morale.

Join us in this exciting journey towards a healthier, happier NJDOT community. Together, we can create a workplace where everyone thrives!

What can you expect from NJDOT's Employee Wellness Program?

- Wellness Games and Challenges
- Tips and Tricks
- Monthly Transporter Wellness Column
- Lunch and Learns
- Breaktime Stretch and Meditation Sessions
- Lunchtime Fitness Classes, including:
  - Yoga
  - Walking and Running Clubs

Interested in participating? Keep an eye on the Intranet for the Monthly Wellness Calendar!

Want to volunteer as a fitness instructor? Contact Alice Hendrickson, here: alice.hendrickson@dot.nj.gov to learn more.

Upcoming Events

Celebrate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month on Wednesday, March 28 at 12 noon in the Courtyard.

(Rain date: Thursday, May 29)

NJDOT's Title VI Office is looking for volunteers who can speak, read and/or write in languages other than English to serve as informal interpreters and translators. This includes individuals who can communicate in American Sign Language (ASL).

Volunteering in NJDOT's Linguistic Pool means the Department can better serve Limited English Proficient (LEP) customers and employees who speak English as a Second Language (ESL).

Volunteers will also have the opportunity for cross-departmental work and exposure and will be recognized with a Service Certificate.

If you're interested in volunteering or learning more, please email titlevi@dot.nj.gov.

Coming this summer! NJDOT is rolling out an all-new podcast, hosted by the Employee Advocates Office, and it's all about boosting employee health and wellness! Stay tuned for more info!

BEHIND THE WHEEL AT NJDOT
MEET THE LEADERS

NJDOT's Behind the Wheel video series has released some new videos! Meet NJDOT's Senior Staff, here:

Medinah Muhammad - Deputy Director, Division of Government and Community Relations

Nisharg Dalwadi - Manager of Finance Unit, Office of Assistant Commissioner, CPM

Omar Diaz - Assistant Division Director, Regional Operations North

Lunch & Learn: Juneteenth Documentary Screening

Date: Monday, June 9, 2025

Time: 12:00 noon

Location: Multi-Purpose Room

"Juneteenth: 1865–2021", an insightful documentary that traces the legacy and evolution of Juneteenth as a national holiday. Bring your lunch, join the conversation, and learn more about this powerful moment in American history.

Juneteenth Main Event

Date: Monday, June 16, 2025

Time: 12:00 noon

Location: DOT Courtyard

This event will highlight the historical journey toward freedom and the ongoing pursuit of honoring Freedom and Transportation.

Keep your eye on your email for more details and volunteer opportunities!

Honoring and celebrating Black history and culture isn't limited to February! The Black History Committee is excited to invite you to NJDOT's upcoming Juneteenth events.

TRANSPORTER

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News & Notes

News & Notes is a collection of employee awards, retirements, service anniversaries and other shareable and NJDOT pride-producing news.

Showcasing the Talent, Pride and Optimism of NJDOT's Female Workforce

By Lizzy Galamba

Commissioner O'Connor began NJDOT's celebration of Women's History Month on its final day, March 31, sharing his interpretation of this year's theme – Moving Forward Together: Women Educating and Inspiring Generations.

"Moving forward together means ensuring that every person – regardless of gender – has a seat at the table and an opportunity to make an impact. Moving forward together means fostering an environment where women at every level can grow, lead, and shape the future of transportation," Commissioner O'Connor said in his opening remarks. "Here at New Jersey DOT – and throughout the industry – women are leading major infrastructure projects, advancing transportation safety, and shaping the policies that will define our roads, bridges, and transit systems for generations to come. So today, let's celebrate the women who have paved the way.

"Let's uplift those who are leading now. And let's commit to creating a future where the transportation industry is as diverse and dynamic as the people who rely on it every day."

Commissioner O'Connor's sentiment was captured in Onarai Williams' original song "Brand New Day" (see page 12), a ballad that inspires us to forgive yesterday's woes and manifest a new day, even a new life, that brings you excitement and joy.

Keynote speaker, Clarelle DeGraffe, Director and General Manager at PATH, followed Williams' performance. DeGraffe began her speech with a comment on diversity, particularly in leadership, at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, applauding the Authority for their inclusion of women in directorship positions. In the 2025 season, five line director positions have been filled by women: Sarah McKeon, Director of Aviation; Beth Rooney, Director of Ports; Diannae Ehler, Director of Tunnels, Bridges and Terminals; and Jolene Yeats, Director of World Trade Center work alongside DeGraffe.

Inspired by her son and his friend group, DeGraffe evolved to work on a diverse team and hopes others continue to evolve to support diversity in the next generation. "It's about doing it together. Women can't do it alone. Men have tried, but they can't do it alone either," DeGraffe said. "It's not about us, it's about the people we serve."

DeGraffe brought the crowd on a tour of her life. Starting with her immigration from Haiti, joking that her first English words were "shut up,"

DeGraffe recalls her mother's encouragement to "listen to those who know you best over the ones who know you least." With this advice, DeGraffe defied both gender and racial barriers being the first Black women to work in management at Kennedy Airport, and she didn't stop there.

As a 30-year employee, DeGraffe has led PATH through the September 11 Terrorist Attacks, Superstorm Sandy and the COVID Pandemic. She attributes her success to flexibility and growth, which allowed her to influence her team through doubts. She has also played a large role in the Women's Council at PATH, which provides job opportunities and industry knowledge to young

women in the field.

In her final thoughts, DeGraffe asked the audience to find one young woman and inspire her worth and value, support her growth, and to the young women in the crowd, she advised: "You will succeed if you are aware of who you are and live in that every day."

The strength and perseverance of her speech was reflected in Afrina Khandakar's rendition of "The Ecstasy of Creation," a poem written by Bangladeshi poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (see page 13). An English translation wasn't necessary to hear the conviction in Khandakar's voice, empowered by Arnab Biswas' drum accompaniment, in this celebration of life's balances.

The poem reminds us that where there is destruction, one can also find a way to rebuild. Where there is darkness, there is light. Where there is doubt, there is certainty. The way in which life balances both the negatives and the positives is where we find freedom, elation.

Maille Bowerman's presentation: The History of Women's Issues and Advocacy in Transportation led the audience through the untold history of female reliance on transportation and how this relationship progressed women's rights, independence and freedom.

The sound of freedom rang true, as Jo Wall took to the stage. Encouraging the audience to clap along to the beat, Wall began her performance of Suhaila Salimpour's "A Tribute to Egyptian Folk Dance and Cultural Legacy." Dressed in traditional Egyptian garb and keeping her own beat with Egyptian hand cymbals, known as Sagat or Sajat, Wall captured the audience with her energetic dance that encourages us to unapologetically celebrate our lives, our achievements and ourselves.

Following Wall's performance, Master of Ceremonies Sarah Ekenezar announced this year's bake-off winners. Coming in first place was Henna Rana for her Biscoff-inspired cupcakes, followed by Gabriella Zalot and Harun Kohli, respectively. Thank you to everyone who participated and shared their creations, including Katie Heisler, Nancy Essandoh, Lois Johann, Laine Rankin, Armento Kirkland, and Clorissa Torres.

Assistant Commissioner Rankin thoughtfully closed out the ceremony, before the audience rushed to the refreshments table, eager to sample the homemade sweets.

Women’s History Month

Brand New Day

Today, we won’t worry about the woes of yesterday
And right now, we’re gonna shake the dust and let our sorrows pass away

‘Cause this moment, I’m gonna let it be a brand new day
And I don’t know what’s gonna happen, but I’m filled with faith

And I don’t know what tomorrow brings, but I see the sun’s bright, bright rays
If I dream it, and conceive it, it will be it
a brand new day

Today, I can hold my head up high and look victory in the face
And right now, I embrace all of the blessings that will come my way

‘Cause this moment, I’m gonna let it be a brand new day
And every tear I had, I’ma wipe them all clear away
And I’ma leave every piece of doubt and all defeat without a trace
If I dream it, and conceive it, it will be it
a brand new day

Written and performed by *Onarai Willams* at NJDOT’s Women’s History Month Celebration on Monday, March 31, 2025

The Ecstasy of Creation

Today I thrill in the ecstasy of creation -
I smile, my eyes glitter,
And my blood revels with effervescent splendour
In the ecstasy of my creation.
That which was stagnant within this cave
Has been today forced open amongst the shattering waves!
Came laughter, there came tears,
Came freedom, there came binds,
My voice is rent, my heart is rent,
And bitter elation there is sent,
All for this tragic heart is meant,
In the ecstasy of my creation.

I became pensive, I became dejected,
Without creation I sighed reflective,
Then the seas began to foam, there was heavenly expansion,
And piercing the sky came the spear of inspiration.
It is a comet that burns,
And the order of creation it overturns,
And as I watch a million flowers bloom in my foundation,
In the ecstasy of my creation.

Even the fire exults, and Spring breathes ruddy,
And Madan flings his arrow bloody.
The flowers of Spring themselves are overwhelmed,
When colour sweeps the four world-ends,
And glows more bright than the yellow-clad maid.
Today there is colour all across my flushed existence
In the ecstasy of creation.

This day I seize the weapon of wile
The beauteous maidens to beguile.
They have the blood-stained feet of Kali,
Though respected, tearful, affectionate, warmly.
I have the words to unlock the feminine heart.
I sound this melodious flute to them, and my tears start,
In the ecstasy of my creation.

Today has come the dusk, the dawn,
The near, the far, the resounding rhythm that overcomes all form,
In mad, ecstatic poesy.
The autumn comes, the flowers drop,
The wintry dew smiles from the blade-top,
In furious, creative ecstasy.

The ocean awakes, the desert rejoices today,
The wide earth shudders, and the forests sway.
A world-devouring storm invades,
While the melody of destruction everywhere pervades.
On my left there lies the decrepit dead,
And on my right the new born babe.

My soul gallops unbound like a wild horse unleashed
In the ecstasy of my creation!
In the ecstasy of my creation!

By Bangladeshi Poet *Kazi Nazrul Islam*, translated by *Shasheen Daad*, performed in Bengali by *Afrina Khandakar* with drum accompaniment by *Arnab Biswas* at NJDOT’s Women’s History Month Celebration on Monday, March 31, 2025

Shop at the Pit Stop

By Lizzy Galamba

The NJDOT Logo Store reopened on March 31 with new merchandise, new hours, new payment methods and even a new name. Show off your NJDOT pride with NJDOT-branded apparel, accessories and drinkware!

"We are so incredibly thankful for the help and support of Ginny throughout the transition process," Danielle DeLorenzo said. "With her help, we have successfully rebranded and reopened the NJDOT store which is now 'The Pit Stop.'"

Located in the connector hallway between MOB and E&O (across from the multi-purpose room), the Pit Stop will be open on Mondays and Wednesdays between 11:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. and is now taking cash, card and Tap to Pay payment options. Merchandise includes:

Accessories	
Hats	Price Varies
ID Sleeve	$4
Pins	$4
Patches	$3
ID Holder	$5
Umbrellas	$10
Cups	Price Varies

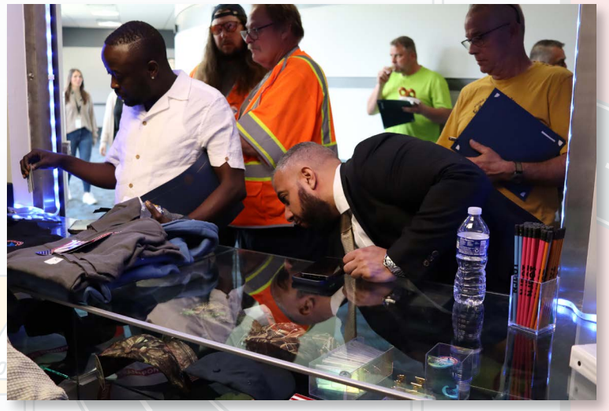
Apparel	
Zip Up Hoodies	$26
Hoodies	$26
Long Sleeve T-Shirts	$20
Short Sleeve T-Shirts	$15
Polos	$23

"We are a non-profit. One dollar is added to each item as a contribution to the Employee Memorial Fund," DeLorenzo said. "These funds will be used for employee events throughout the year such as the Employee Appreciation Picnic, Backyard Olympics and Take Your Child to Work Day."

Be sure to show your support and grab your merch fast! Less than a month after the Grand Opening, the Pit Stop announced that they were sold out, closing their doors from April 25 through May 5 while they restocked.

"We never, in a million years, anticipated how big of a hit the store would be. Opening on extra days for the Operations Service Awards and Take Your Child to Work Day wiped us out," DeLorenzo said. "It is incredible to see how excited everyone at DOT is for the new merchandise the store offers. We love seeing everyone looking great in their new hats, shirts and hoodies. We are also keeping DOT extra hydrated with our line of personalized and reusable drinkware."

Stop by and say hi to the Pit Stop volunteers, including Kristen Miller, Joelle Bergner-Bourne, Lisa Zacchino, Justina Peoples, Sara Mondello, Lisa Daniels, Sean Appleby, Michael Mancino, Gerrianne Corcillo, Becky Rouze, Melissa Edwards, Lauren Hernandez, Adam Grimanis, Margaret Masterson, Tim Duff, Ann Fletcher, Daniel Voorhees and Danielle King, and spruce up your NJDOT wardrobe.



Asian Americans in Transportation: From Forced Labor and Internment Camps to the Kings of Cars and Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta

By Howard Gensler

For Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month, the *Transporter* is going to look at an amazing century of progress, encapsulated in the life of former Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta, a Japanese American.

Japanese, Chinese and Indian (mostly Punjabi) immigrants first started arriving in the United States in the mid-1800s. The Chinese mostly came to search for gold in California. But if the gold digging didn't pan out, and it usually didn't, many were hired to build the western portion of the Central Pacific Railroad. The pay was pitiful, and the work was dangerous. An estimated 1,000 Chinese laborers died in the 1860s laying the tracks that would hasten America's westward expansion. The Japanese and Punjabi immigrants worked in many areas (logging, canning), but mostly farming.

As the case has always been with new immigrants, these Asians faced discrimination and were forced to live apart from the settlers, who'd taken over from the Native Americans. When economic times got tougher and even bad jobs were desirable, discrimination worsened. In 1862 Congress forbade Chinese immigrants from coming to the U.S. by ship – and there was no other way to get here. The Naturalization Act of 1870 forbade Asians from becoming citizens. As if that wasn't clear enough, in 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act became the first law in the nation's history to ban a specific group – the "Muslim Ban" of its time. For the next few decades, the only Chinese allowed to enter America were diplomats, businesspeople and students – no laborers. In 1905, there was an anti-American boycott in China. The 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act stalled immigration from Asia, and in 1924, the Johnson-Reed Act put quotas on immigrants from foreign countries and basically outlawed immigration from Asia.

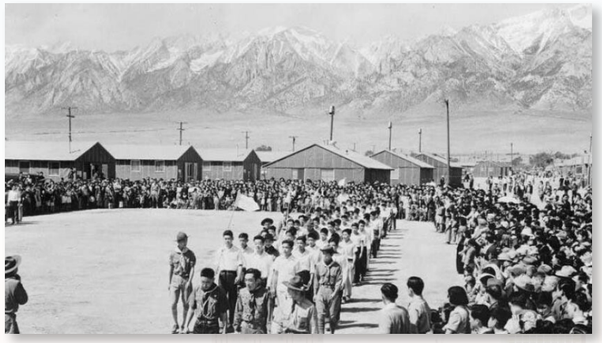
The Chinese Exclusion Act was not repealed until 1943, when America, embroiled in the Second World War, tried to smooth things over with China, at the same time forcibly jailing Japanese immigrants in detention camps. The end of the war led Japan to rebuild its auto industry, with the help of America, and the oil crisis of the 1970s made the smaller, more efficient Japanese cars more popular in the United States. Since then, there's been no looking back:

Toyota now owns 15 percent of the U.S. auto market, ahead of Ford's 13 percent. Combined with South Korea's Hyundai (11 percent) and Kia (2.4 percent), plus Japan's Honda (9 percent), Nissan (1.9 percent), Subaru (1.6 percent), Mazda (1.5 percent), and Lexus (1.1 percent), it would be reasonable to say that Asia drives America. Asian companies produce nearly 45 percent of American cars and trucks (although many of them are made in America). Honda also holds the top spot for motorcycles, outpacing Harley Davidson, and with Kawasaki, Yamaha, and Suzuki, Japan accounts for around half the motorcycles sold in America.

Norman Mineta

Transportation for Asian Americans means progressing and moving forward, despite your circumstances. A perfect example of this success is Norman Mineta. Mineta, of Japanese descent, was born in San Jose, California in 1931. During WWII, Mineta and his family were interned for years at a relocation camp in Wyoming.

Continued on page 17



Eight years after the war ended, Mineta graduated from Cal State-Berkeley. He then served in military intelligence for the same army that feared he might be a Japanese spy as a teenager just one decade earlier. In 1971, he was elected mayor of San Jose, and in 1974, Mineta was elected to Congress and founded the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.

What goes around comes around and Mineta was instrumental in passing the Congressional apology to Japanese Americans for the way he and one hundred thousand others were treated during WWII. Mineta was a Congressman for 20 years, and in the 1980s and 90s, served on the House Transportation Committee, which he chaired, before leaving his seat to take a job at Lockheed Martin. He then chaired the National Civil Aviation Review Commission.

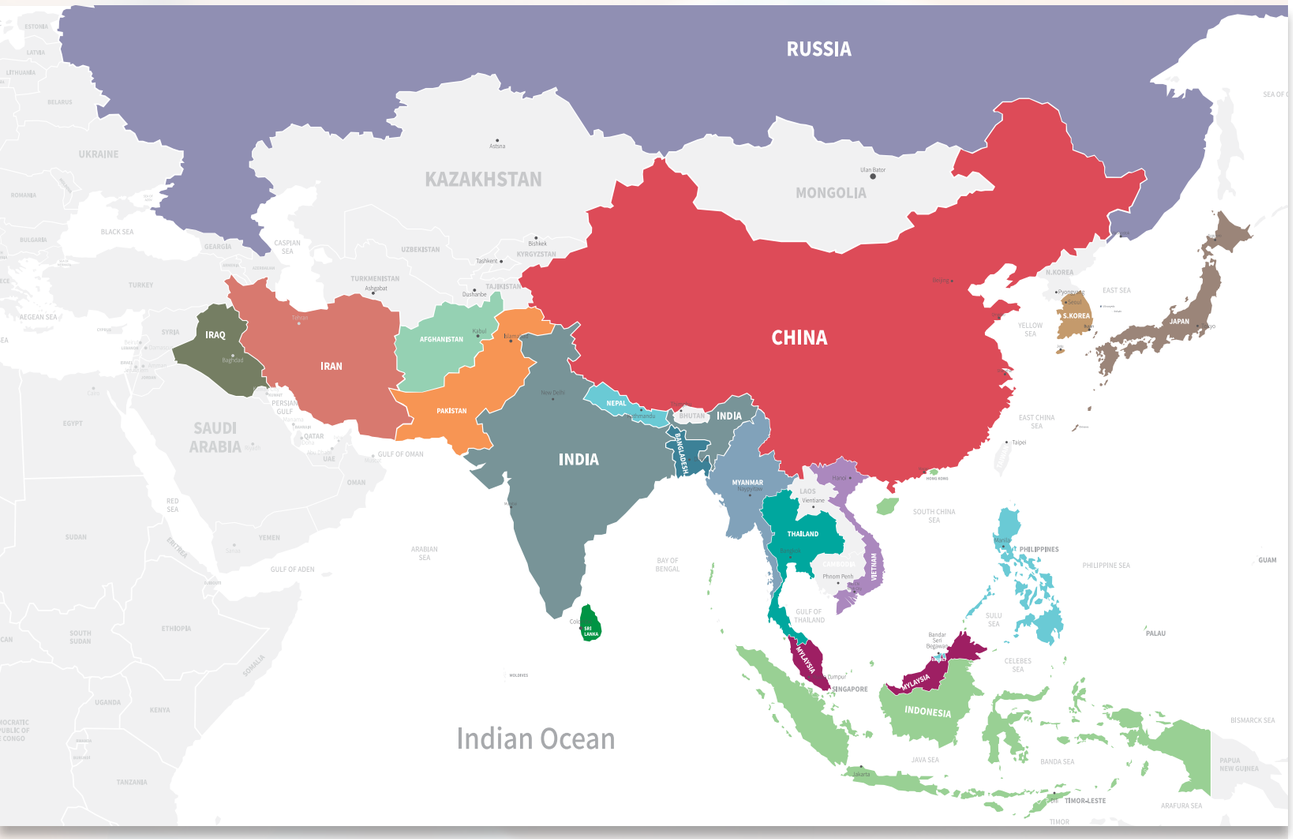
President Bill Clinton named Mineta Secretary of Commerce in 2000, making him the first Asian American Cabinet Member. When President George Bush took office in 2001, he named Mineta Secretary of Transportation. Mineta was the first Asian American to hold the position and the only Democrat in Bush's cabinet. He served a record five years as Secretary of Transportation and is perhaps best known for ordering more than 4,000 planes out of the sky after the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. Ten days later, Mineta, remembering his vow to the Constitution and his own days in an internment camp, ordered U.S. airlines to not racially profile Muslims and Middle Easterners when boarding flights.

Mineta's legacy stretches across the country. Miles of California State Highway 85 are named for him, as is the former San Jose International Airport. San Jose State University houses the Mineta Transportation Institute. Mineta is also one of two Transportation secretaries whose name is on the national headquarters of the Department of Transportation. He died in 2022, age 90.

Asian Countries Represented at NJDOT

By Lizzy Galamba

Did you know nearly 17 percent of NJDOT's workforce is of Asian and Asian American descent? 567 self-identified Asian and Asian American NJDOT employees represent 17 Asian countries.



Afghanistan | Bangladesh | China | India | Indonesia

Iran | Iraq | Japan | Malaysia | Nepal | Pakistan

Russia | South Korea | Sri Lanka | Thailand | Vietnam

**Data received from the NJDOT Asian American Heritage Committee. If your country is not represented here, please contact the Committee and see how you can become involved with NJDOT cultural celebrations!*

Operations Out of State

By Lizzy Galamba

Operations has been on the move. Recent trainings have taken NJDOT's Operations leaders out of state – some going as far as Texas! – to hone their leadership skills and better prepare for upcoming events and issues that may arise both in-state and nationwide.

Emergency Response Training in Texas

Back in February, Omar Diaz, Assistant Director of Region North Operations, and Liz Falcon, Statewide Response Coordinator in the Office of Emergency Management, Security, and Response, attended a Texas A&M Engineering and Extension (TEEX) Service training course in College Station, Texas with NJ Transit (NJT) colleagues.

The course, hosted at the National Emergency Response and Rescue Training Center/Emergency Operations Training Center's Disaster City, used computer-driven and staged simulated incidents to sharpen incident management, situational awareness and decision-making skills, as well as clarify staff and jurisdictional responsibilities during emergency events.

"TEEX provided realistic emergency response simulations with an opportunity to practice various roles in Incident Command and to engage with Emergency Response Personnel from different disciplines," Falcon said. "It is an immersive experience with challenges that

can be applied in real world emergencies and is undoubtedly one of the best trainings in Emergency Management."

For New Jersey, this TEEX training means preparing leadership and operations personnel at NJDOT and NJT for the 2026 FIFA World Cup – an event that will require a large-scale, hands-on, multi-agency response.

"This experience helped enhance my decision-making and preparedness skills to safely and effectively manage and support a crisis response to large-scale incidents, especially in the operational planning of FIFA World Cup coming to New Jersey in 2026," Diaz said. "I am grateful for the opportunity to learn from experts and collaborate with like-minded professionals and law enforcement partners in the region."

Falcon also joined Robert Burd, Manager in the Office of Emergency Management, Security, and Response, for the New Jersey Emergency Preparedness Association (NJEPA) Conference in early April. The focus of this year's conference being the 2024 Francis Scott Key Bridge Collapse and managing critical infrastructure emergencies.

AASHTO Executive Institute (AEI) in Washington D.C.

Bringing together senior executive management from transportation agencies around the country, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Executive Institute offered an opportunity to discuss needs and responsibilities of transportation executives, as well as a safe space to discuss challenges and find solutions.

Held in Washington D.C. from late April to early May, the multi-day conference was attended by NJDOT's Chris Tomlin, Director of Region North Operations, and Pankesh Patel, Deputy Director of the Division of Project Management.

"The AEI was by far the best training event I have attended during the course of my DOT career," Tomlin said. "It was designed to help managers understand the senior executive position in transportation. Not only did we participate in classroom discussions and exercises, we also travelled to the US DOT and the HART Senate Building and held discussions with the senior staff. I would recommend this course to anyone who is going to be in senior management in the future."

Patel expressed his agreement with Tomlin. AEI not only expanded participants' understanding of leadership positions but also introduced them to national transportation issues and trends, while providing a platform to network with administration, congressional, and industry professionals.

Upcoming Events

Got talent? Consider participating in NJDOT's Talent Show on Thursday, June 26 from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Whether you can sing, dance, play an instrument, perform magic or have another unique ability, be sure to register by Friday, June 6!

2025 Employee Recognition Week Picnic

Picnic Date: Wednesday, June 25, 2025 - Rain Date: Friday, June 27, 2025

Interested in attending? Get your ticket. One ticket per person for head count.

NJDOT's 2025 Employee Recognition Week will be held from June 23 through June 27. The picnic is scheduled for **Wednesday, June 25,** with Friday, June 27 reserved for the rain date.

Be sure to purchase your $1.00 ticket, on or before **Friday, June 13.** A ticket booth will be outside the Cafeteria and Credit Union on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

On Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays, please contact the following individuals:

Lisa Zacchino – E&O 2nd Floor – 609-963-1566
Danielle King – E&O 2nd Floor – 609-963-1562
Meg Frampton – E&O 2nd Floor – 609-963-1434
Teresa Manna – F&A 1st Floor – 609-963-2295
Danielle DeLorenzo - MOB 2nd Floor – 609-963-2154

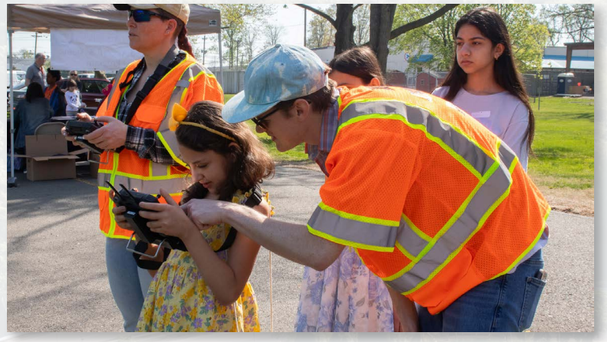
SOMERSET PATRIOTS

Whether you love the game, crave the food or want a reason to hang out with your favorite co-worker after hours, consider joining your NJDOT colleagues for the Somerset Patriot's baseball game on **Friday, August 1.**

Keep an eye on your email for details on ticket purchases!

Then & Now: Take Your Kids to Work Day at NJDOT

By Nick DeJohn



Take Your Kids to Work Day at the New Jersey Department of Transportation has long been a cherished tradition, bridging generations through shared curiosity. For many current employees who once walked the halls of NJDOT as wide-eyed "DOT Tots," the event now carries a special meaning as they experience it from the other side—as hosts, mentors, and parents. While much has changed, a familiar thread remains: the sense of pride, wonder, and discovery that comes from being behind the scenes of the work that keeps New Jersey moving… literally.

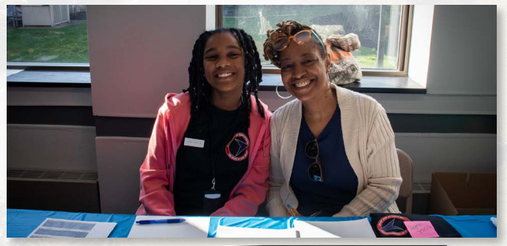
WHAT'S DIFFERENT: One of the most striking differences between 20 to 30 years ago and today is the overall structure of the event. In the past, the day was organized as a guided tour, with children moving together through a planned itinerary that offered a cohesive glimpse into the workings of the Department. In contrast, the modern version is far more open-ended, with multiple activity zones operating simultaneously, allowing families to explore at their own pace. This shift may be partly a response to increased participation (a record number of attendees this year!) or a post-COVID response (flexible and spacious). While the earlier format offered a shared, unified experience, today's structure encourages exploration and personalization. Both styles have their merits, and this year's event demonstrated a thoughtful balance—successfully managing logistics while still engaging a large, diverse group.

WHAT'S SIMILAR: Although the structure has changed, the content has remained largely consistent, with NJDOT once again offering a multitude of events, activities, and demonstrations to highlight their efforts in keeping New Jersey's roads safe for millions. There were traffic light exhibitions, working suspension bridge models, and presentations by the K-9 Unit and fire department, all available for children to personally interact with. And, of course, the classic horn-honking of DOT's various construction vehicles was a crowd favorite, returning once again after a brief hiatus.

This is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the "Then and Now" of Take Your Kids to Work Day, but this article is not intended to spark debates among friends or colleagues about which version is superior. Instead, it aims to foster collaboration by encouraging the integration of positive elements from each year to create the best experience possible. Reflecting on the event from the perspectives of both past and present participants provides unique insight into how the program has evolved while remaining committed to its mission of inspiring the next generation.

"Take Your Child to Work Day was always a special tradition for me growing up, and not just because it was a day off from school. My mom, Stacy Devlin, has worked for NJDOT for over 37 years, so for almost my entire childhood, I attended TYCTWD. In my first year as an employee here, my mom and I worked at one of the registration tables for TYCTWD; it definitely felt like a full-circle moment! Seeing the next generation of families doing the same things we did was such a great experience and a wonderful reminder of how special these types of traditions are." – Ashley Matthews

"It was interesting to experience Take Your Child to Work Day from an adult perspective. I remember participating in the event throughout my childhood and how exciting it was to see both the children and NJDOT staff taking a break from their routine to share their work with us. As a kid, TYCTWD had the same whimsy as visiting the Franklin Institute, with NJDOT staff showcasing their roles in a fun and interactive way. Now, as an adult, I appreciate seeing awestruck children engaging in tasks that are second nature to us, inspiring a whole new generation. It was quite moving to witness." – Mariah Kondash



A Celebratory Spring

By Lizzy Galamba

March was a pride-producing month for NJDOT's engineers, as many people and projects were recognized for exemplary engineering and service. On March 11, Alliance for Action NJ hosted the 14th Annual Leading Capital Construction Projects award ceremony. Four NJDOT projects received awards: Route 66, Jumping Brook Road to Bowne Road/Wayside Road; I-80 over Howard Boulevard; Pulaski Skyway Contract 8B; and Route 15 and Berkshire Valley Road Improvements.

Sangaran Vijayakumar, who was recognized for his work on the Route 66, Jumping Brook Road to Bowne Road/Wayside Road project, received a specific shoutout by Pankesh Patel. Patel also sent a congratulatory message to this year's American Council of Engineering Companies NJ (ACECNJ) 54th Engineering Excellence award winners.

Nine NJDOT projects received nominations for ACECNJ's awards, held on March 12. These projects include:

- I-295/Route 42 Missing Moves; represented by Andrew Maevsky
- Route 3, Route 46, Valley Road and Notch Road Contract B; represented by David Rauzino
- Route 15 and Berkshire Valley Road; represented by Kamalavathany Ravishankar
- River Road Bridge over I-287 Superstructure Replacement; represented by Kevin Bancroft
- Weldon Road over Route 15 Emergency Bridge Replacement; represented by David Rauzino
- Smart Moves 2020 North; represented by Jose Romero
- Route 57, Lopatcong Creek Culvert Replacement; represented by Sunay Pandya
- Washington Road (CR 571) Bridge over D&R Canal High Priority Bridge Replacement; represented by Omar Hameed
- NJDOT Bordentown Training Center; represented by Dennis Meszaros

Of the nine nominations, two projects won Honor Awards for medium-sized projects and have been nominated for National ACEC Recognition Awards: the River Road Bridge over I-287 Superstructure Replacement and Washington Road (CR 571) Bridge over D&R Canal High Priority Bridge Replacement projects. The I-295/Route 42 Missing Moves project received an Honor Award for a large-scale project, and the NJDOT Bordentown Training Center won the Honor Award for a non-transportation project.

Commissioner Fran O'Connor was also recognized at the event and received the Distinguished Service Award.

The award winning continued into April at the American Society of Highway Engineers award dinner on April 10. Here, the Department won the Agency of the Year Award, and Mike Kasbekar won the Project of the Year Award in the $5 to $30 million category for Route 30 over Beach Thorofare.

Other NJDOT personnel - Krishna Tripathi, Alex Borovskis, and Mohab Hussein – volunteered to judge the Project of the Year Award, and Sangaran Vijayakumar judged the Student of the Year Competition.

"Congratulations and kudos to all," Patel said. "Thank you for volunteering and helping out American Society of Highway Engineers!"

Service Milestones

45 Years of Service

Thomas G. Bushar
Mary B. Esposito

40 Years of Service

Glenn D. Adams
Annunziata Dempsey

25 Years of Service

Bruce J. Baker
Ashok B. Brahmbhatt
Ryan Cox
John J. Desimone
Michael A. Graham
Michael Hall
Deborah Marquez
Rafael A. Menedez
Dawn M. Morales
Susan R. Parzyck
Tiffany Reyolds
Paul Sprewell
Gary M. Szczesny

20 Years of Service

Naresh K. Agrawal
Samantha A. Canulli
James Lepri
Talayia Little
John P. Mikusa
Samer A. Shahwan
Piyush K. Modi
Nicole K. Onorati
Beverly D. Queen
Elijah Richardson
Nikunj J. Shah
Corraine Williams

Employee Retirements March and April 2025

March 2025

Edward Krupa
37 Years of Service

Anthony Manley
25 Years of Service

George Schwarz
33 Years of Service

April 2025

Daryl Frank
21 Years of Service

Michael Hanley
39 Years of Service

William Lytch
24 Years of Service

Rafael Menedez
43 Years of Service

Thomas O'Hara
39 Years of Service